

# Rising Oil Theft and Matters Arising

By Jonathan Nda-Isaiah

In the last few weeks, public officials are falling over each other to give grim statistics on the humongous amount of crude oil stolen daily in the country. All of a sudden, our public officials are experiencing the Eureka moment. They just realized that our crude oil is being stolen daily. The Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, recently said that the country loses 400,000 barrels of crude daily via oil theft. He described the development as a “national emergency”. He regretted that the nation had fallen short of OPEC daily quota, from 1.8 million barrels to 1.4 million barrels, due to crude theft. Similarly, recent reports said Nigeria lost not less than \$3.5 billion in revenue to crude oil theft in 2021 alone, representing about 10 percent of the country's foreign reserves. Also not long, the Senate President, Dr. Ahmad Lawan in Abuja said oil theft is “debilitating and threatening to throw the economy into a coma adding that Nigeria loses one million barrels of crude oil daily to crude theft. This needs to stop. Pointedly, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC) said it uncovered an illegal 4-kilometer (km) pipeline from Forcados terminal to the sea and a loading port that had operated undetected in the last nine years.

Mele Kyari, group chief executive officer (GCEO), NNPC Limited, said oil theft in the country has been going on for over 22 years but the dimension and rate it assumed in recent times is unprecedented. Now that we have finished lamenting, what is the next step? I am impressed by the new drive of the GCEO of NNPC to tackle oil theft but the question remains commendable but how far can he go? Tackling oil thieves requires strong political will and balls. Make no mistake about it, crude oil theft is not carried out by small thieves but by the big boys who are chilling in their mansions in Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Lagos. Our public officials should stop pontificating and do the right thing. They all know the oil thieves but lack the “cajons” to arrest the high-profile criminals because most of them are active participants and beneficiaries. Unless we want to continue deceiving ourselves, crude oil theft cannot happen without the active participation of political, traditional, and top military leaders. The governors in the south-south can tackle oil theft because I don't want to believe they don't know the perpetrators of the massive heist going on in their region. In my opinion, the recent 4 billion surveillance contract given to the former militant leader, Tompolo is a vote of no confidence on the Nigerian military to protect our pipelines. We hear stories of policemen and military officers bribing to get posted to the Niger Delta just because they want to participate in the free- for -all oil theft in the region. Last week we were treated to another Netflix Nigerian classic when I read Tompolo's men ambushed and arrested eight members of a suspected crude oil syndicate while they were pumping crude oil

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from a Chevron Nigeria Limited, CNL, pipeline in Delta State, into an improvised 87-meter-long ocean-going vessel, MT Deino. I had a good laugh reading the story. The drama never ends in this country. As the senate president rightly said, crude oil thieves are Nigeria's worst enemies, and we need to treat this as a matter of national emergency. Right now, the country is on a borrowing binge and we cannot continue on that path. Indeed, blocking revenue leakages will go a long way in shoring up our revenue and reducing our appetite for borrowing. At the end of the day Nigeria will be winner.